



# Fire Funding Impacts

## National Forests in Florida

Florida

### FOREST OVERVIEW

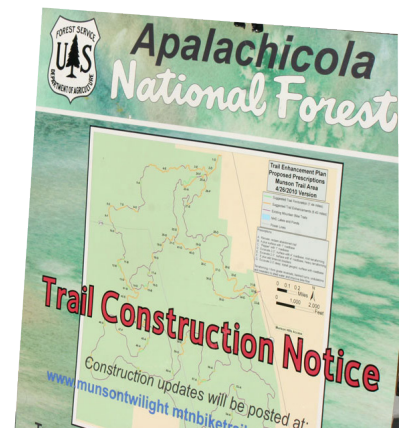
The National Forests in Florida include three forests—the Apalachicola, Osceola, and Ocala. Combined, these national forest lands span more than 1.2 million acres throughout the State with a \$25 million annual budget and less than 200 employees statewide. The National Forests in Florida also manages the 1,400-mile Florida National Scenic Trail, which is 1 of 11 national scenic trails in the United States. Over 75,000 acres are designated Federal wilderness areas with no roads and no access permitted except on foot. These forests contain more than 3,000 documented archaeological sites and nearly 60 historic sites. Specialists monitor 145 plant species and 51 animal species that are either threatened or endangered. The forests cover more than 1,200 miles of recreational trails and 65 developed recreation sites that see more than 2.7 million visitors every year.

Redirected funds will restrict the ability to accomplish mission critical programs, such as the following.

### RECREATION

Loss of funding restricts the forests' ability to make the changes necessary to stay relevant and offer the recreation opportunities desired by the public.

- Inability to contract inspections for campground water systems forestwide, potentially exposing the public to unhealthy drinking water.
- Inability to repair air conditioners in the historic Pittman Visitor Center, rendering the building unusable during most of the year and unable to service visitors. Lack of climate control also contributes to building deterioration.
- Inability to repair air conditioner in the Ocean Pond campground gatehouse, rendering the building unusable during most of the year and unable to service visitors. Lack of climate control also contributes to building deterioration.
- Inability to execute an agreement with the University of Florida to provide start-up funding for work associated with forestwide National Visitor Use Monitoring next year.
- Inability to purchase equipment on the Apalachicola National Forest necessary for the upkeep of recreation sites and trails.
- Inability to purchase building materials for trail infrastructure improvements at Ft. Gadsden on the Florida National Scenic Trail (FNST) near Ocean Pond Campground in the Osceola National Forest, and elsewhere on the FNST.



*Loss of program funding restricts the forests' ability to maintain recreation sites and trails.*

### PRESCRIBED FIRE

Redirected funds prevent forests' ability to reach the desired frequency for prescribed fire, mandated in the forest Land Management Plan, of 2–3 years rotation or ~168,000–252,000 acres annually.

- Impacts wildland-urban interface and the ability to keep communities safe from wildfires.

(over)



- Impacts ability to effectively treat wilderness areas, causing an accumulation of fuels difficult to control during a wildfire.
- Impacts local communities as, historically, many large fires in the National Forests in Florida have started in wilderness areas within close proximity to local communities, causing threats to natural resources and those communities.
- Impacts the ability to treat fire-dependent ecosystems, thereby affecting the imperiled longleaf pine and Big Scrub ecosystems and subsequent threatened and endangered species, such as red-cockaded woodpeckers.

## ECOSYSTEMS

The shift in funding impacts mission critical oversight of managing for sustainable resources.

- The National Forests in Florida estimate that, with additional staffing, timber sales could increase at least 5 percent per year, increasing benefits to local communities. Currently, we are at approximately 100,000 CCF (100 cubic feet of wood) per year.
- Loss of “seed money” means loss of ability to propagate partnerships, loss of income, loss of projects, and loss of personnel.

## ROADS

Reduced program funding prevents the accomplishment of substantial road projects on major access roads, leading to degradation and creating user safety and resource damage concerns.

- Public access to recreational opportunities is restricted at times, particularly after inclement weather.
- Forests are forced to close roads when safety factors are significant.
- Forests are unable to utilize partnership monies from State and Federal agencies to maintain roads vital for local economies and for transportation routes for surrounding communities, as well as hunters and recreationists.
- Approximately 43 percent of road maintenance is impacted, equating to over 5,000 miles of road not being maintained adequately each year.



*Reduced program funding leads to inadequate road maintenance.*

## HERITAGE

Redirected funds have prevented forests' ability to provide the needed level of maintenance and care of historical buildings and sites, including National Historic Landmarks.

- The Langston House in the Apalachicola National Forest needs \$40,000 in stabilization work to keep it from deteriorating—it is part of the Big Bend Scenic Byway, with interpretive signing inviting visitors to this embarrassingly unmaintained site. A great example of old cracker architecture in its original setting, the house was built around the turn of the 20th century (circa 1904) and provides insight to life of Florida's earliest, poorest settlers.
- Four historic fire towers suffer from deferred maintenance, and condition assessments are needed to maintain these unique and symbolic Forest Service structures.

## PERSONNEL

Loss of funding reduces the forests' ability to attract and maintain a competitive workforce.

- Reduced funding often means reduced financial awards, incentives, or recognition.
- A competitive and fresh workforce is not interested in a stagnant mission that may result from loss of funding and mission identity due to morphing into a fire management agency.
- Inability to hire the proper amount of people to staff programs leads to overwork, stress, fatigue, frustration, and general unhappiness of existing staff, and increases the likelihood of accidents, poor decisionmaking, and forced tradeoffs that expose the staff and the public to increased safety risks.